

Firewise Landscaping by Betty McCulley, Master Gardener & Firewise Landscape Specialists

In light of the continuing wild fires and drought, it seems most appropriate to discuss Firewise Landscaping and how this relates to you and your home. Few of us have the opportunity to start fresh on our landscape, but each of us can adopt safety procedures to help control wildfires. For Decades, builders have built subdivisions, and people have moved into picturesque landscapes, while having little knowledge of wildfires. Wildfires are affected by fuel, terrain (fire moves uphill faster than downhill; the most dangerous place is the top of a hill), and weather. High winds and drought conditions will cause fires to spread quickly. A burning ember can be carried a mile by strong winds.

If managed correctly, Firewise Landscaping can serve as a means to protect your home. The following are examples that we need to be aware of, and if necessary change.

- Firewood, propane tanks, or any flammable materials, such as paint or paint supplies, should be stored 30 feet from the house.
- An untreated wood deck is a fire hazard. Firewood should never be store beneath the deck. Do not allow debris and clutter to collect under the deck. Wire mesh is excellent to install around the lower portion of the deck to help it remain clean.
- Never plant Juniper, Fir, Mesquite, Cedar or Holly close to your home.
- Space trees sparingly, 20-30 feet apart. Prune all tress to a minimum of 6 – 10 feet for the lowest branches. Likewise, locate shrubs and flowerbeds away from your home.
- There should be at least a 3 foot space, preferably filled with rocks or gravel, between shrubs and the foundations of the house.
- Plants close to your home should be non-flammable and low growing. A fireproof plant does not exist, but some are more resistant that others. Plants that have little oil, such as Boxwoods and Wax Leaf Ligustram shrubs. Red Oak and Maple trees are good choices; they are deciduous with an open canopy.
- Have a fire resistant roof, and use fire resistant building materials.
- Wooden fences should never be attached to the house.
- When using wood mulch in the flowerbeds, stop 10 feet from the house. Keep mulch watered.
- Mow lawn regularly.
- Keep gutters clean and free of leaves and twigs.
- Tall trees and shrubs should never be close to your home, wooden deck or roof.
- Make sure your address is very visible for the firemen.

One question often asked is “Isn’t the firemen supposed to save my house?” Not necessarily. Given a choice between two houses, one that has firewood stored on the deck, with tall shrubs and cedar trees surrounding the structure, or the home using Firewise Landscaping ideas, the last is the home that would be saved. Firemen do not have unlimited personnel, equipment, or time to save all buildings.

The most important person protecting your home from a wildfire is you.